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ABSTRACT

This document examines the development and influence of the Free Institute of Education (Institucion Libre de Ensenanza) and of its founder, Don Francisco Giner de los Rios, in late nineteenth century Spain. Founded in 1876 against a background of repression and reimposition of state-controlled education during the Bourbon Restoration the Institute was a private institution free of Church and State. Its intent was to create an alternative to the higher education system of official Spain, but due to financial problems, it evolved into an institution of primary and secondary education. Subject matter included traditional, State-required subjects, but also anthropology, technology, social sciences, economics, art, drawing, singing, and handwork--all generally neglected in State- and Church-run schools. Most radical were the innovations in art and physical education (stressing free inquiry, observation, and spontaneous criticism in the former, and development of the whole person in the latter) and in the institution of field trips, hiking, and nature observation. The use of textbooks was discouraged as much as possible, and examinations were regarded as producing mostly negative results. Emphasis was placed instead upon the creation of student notebooks that reflected the pupil's judgment and synthesis of materials. Don Francisco borrowed much from the French and English forms of education, and was influenced by Rousseau, Froebel, Pestalozzi, Krause, and Sanz Del Rio, the last of whom provided his ideal of reconciling all human facilities to produce an artistic taste, technical preparedness, spiritual elevation and an austere, moral sense of life. The Institute fell victim to the Civil War of 1936, but proved a pervasive influence in Spanish society to this day. (MB)

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Noel M. Valis

"Reform in Spanish Education: the Institución Libre de Enseñanza"

Introduction

It has sometimes been said of Spanish philosophy, "What Spanish philosophy?" The same reproach might be directed at the non-existence of Spanish education. "There ain't no such animal," some might claim, forgetting for the moment the intellectual freedom and depth of thirteenth-century Toledo under the reign of Alfonso X, the Wise (El Sabio), and the splendor and revival of learning in the sixteenth-century Universities of Salamanca, Alcalá and other institutions. What is mostly remembered, however, is the disheartening decline of Spanish education, ushered in by the rigidities, fears and intolerance of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain.

But this view of education in Spain, of necessity simplified, would not be complete without mention of the establishment and significance of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, in English, the Free Institution/Institute of Education. In order to understand more clearly the Institute's impact on Spanish society, I will review very quickly some of the historical background to its founding in 1876.

Historical Background

A broad overview of nineteenth-century Spain reveals to us that the "lack of civility" among Spaniards, which reached such extreme proportions during the 1936-39 Civil War, had

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its roots in the last century. Civil war, frequent military uprisings in the form of "pronunciamientos," and dissension everywhere created an ambience of unease and fragmentation within Spanish society. Historians talk of "Las dos Españas," the "two Spains," that is, the liberal, progressive side as opposed to the traditional, sometimes reactionary side of the country. It is probably more accurate, however, to talk of the many Spains.

To disagree was the Spaniard's right -- no, his duty to himself, to his own proud sense of individuality and dignity. A solution imposed from above, from the State, seemed, in many cases, the only solution when there were problems, and there were many -- economic, political, religious. The problem of Spanish education was only one of several, and it too came to be subsumed into the more general and overriding conflict of State versus Individual, of Authority vs. Freedom. Reconciling such absolutes frequently failed. Worse still, the distinction between philosophy and ideology, that is, between the search for truth and the molding, frequent distorting of existential reality to one's own conception of it, this distinction would too often become blurred in the disputes and violence of nineteenth-century Spain. Tempers rose, passions were unleashed, ideologies reigned supreme, and somewhere in the shuffle, clarity of vision and truth were lost.

This split in Spanish society in part gave birth to the Free Institute of Education. Specifically, we must look to

the years 1868 and 1874 to explain how the Institute came into being. The date 1868 conjures up one outstanding event in modern Spanish history: the overthrow of the reigning Bourbon monarch, Isabel II, an action which is termed the Glorious Revolution of 1868. It was a somewhat qualified victory for the liberal cause in Spain since the end result was to bring confusion, instability, bitterness, and finally, in 1874, the reestablishment of another Bourbon king, Isabel's son, Alfonso XII. This period, called the Restoration (Restauración) in Spain, also reinstated the State-controlled, religiously oriented educational system which the Revolution of 1868 had attempted to change. This move and the specific action which the Minister in charge of education, Manuel de Orovio, brought against the future founder of the Institute, Francisco Giner de los Ríos, would be the direct and immediate causes of the Institute's creation.

Spanish Education:Overview

Before going into a more detailed explanation of the origins of the Institute, I think a brief look at the state of Spanish education prior to 1876 would be useful. In my opening statement, I mentioned two high points in the history of Spanish education: the medieval center of learning in Toledo and the sexteenth-century Universities of Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares. Both periods were characterized by a high enthusiasm for learning and considerable freedom in which to do it. In Toledo, Jews, Moors and Christians collaborated together in a spirit of respect and tolerance.

In the first half of the sixteenth century, students and professors at Salamanca, Alcala and other universities constituted, within an amazing diversity of university modes of existence, an entity independent of the strictures and authority of the State. Yet by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, learning in Spain seemed to have ceased. For example, at the University of Salamanca the Chair for Mathematics and Astrology -- the title speaks for itself, I think -- remained vacant for thirty years until it was finally filled in 1726.

What happened? In brief: the Counter-Reformation. This is obviously a great simplification of the causes of Spain's decadence in education and elsewhere. But certainly Spain's withdrawal and increasing isolation from the rest of Europe from the middle of the sixteenth century on explains in part the origins of stagnation in her schools and universities. In 1559 Philip II forbade study in foreign universities; shortly before that, he banned the importing of books from abroad. The additional power of the Inquisition to safeguard orthodoxy among Spaniards and weed out the impure and heretical elements must also be taken into account. And finally, as the historian Américo Castro has pointed out, Spaniards became reluctant to demonstrate intellectual powers and curiosity for fear of being taken for a Jew. Spanish Jews were known for their interest in intellectual matters. And nobody wanted to deal with the Inquisition.

To control the inner life and content of the universities and other schools the government stepped in so that by

the nineteenth century Spanish schools, particularly the Universities, to quote Salvador Madariaga, "were mere Government establishments for the granting of official diplomas" (p. 75, Spain, N.Y., 1943). He goes on to say that "in a sense all universities tend fatally to become degree factories. But in Spain...they were nothing else."

Schooling on all levels was plagued by unimaginative, and stiff, unbending teaching, bad textbooks, long hours of routine and frequent utter boredom, and sometimes even brutalization. Memorization and recitation were the chief pedagogic tools. The first third of the last century also brought in more imitation of French manners and customs, certainly not the first instance of French influence on Spanish education. Eighteenth-century Spain had already adopted Gallic centralization of schooling. The critic Mariano José de Larra describes the mania of copying, badly, I might add, French mores among the Spanish middle classes and well-to-do. The narrator of "El casarse pronto y mal" writes that his sister became enamored of French customs and from then on, "bread was no longer bread (pan), nor wine, wine (vino)." "Suffice it to say," continues Larra in this ironic vein,

> that my sister adopted the ideas of the period; but as this second education was as shallow and superficial as the first (her Spanish upbringing), and as that weak segment of humanity never knows how not to go to extremes, she suddenly jumped from the Christian Year of Our Lord 18-- to the era of Pigault Lebrun [a frivolous, sometimes scandalous French novelist] and left off going to Mass and devotions, without knowing in the least why she did so or why she used to go in the first place. She said that her son could be educated in whatever manner it suited him; that he could read without order or method whatever books fell into his hands; and God knows what other things she said about ignorance and fanaticism, reason and enlightenment, adding that re-

ligion was a social contract into which only idiots entered in good faith and that the boy didn't need religion to be good; that the terms, father and mother (padre y madre) were lower-class, and that one should treat one's papá and mama familiarly with the tú form of address because there is no friendship like that which unites parents to their children. (Artículos de Costumbres, Madrid, [1832], 1965), p. 62.

Another writer of a later period, José María de Pereda, retains this image of his school days in the 1840's:

> The chill of death, the obscurity of a dungeon, the stench of grottoes, the unhappiness, affliction and pain of torture permeated the classroom...Virgil and Dante, so clever in depicting hell and torment, would have been at wit's end to describe those images of school which are engraved in my memory for the rest of my life...I believed myself cut off from the refuge of my family and the protection of the State; I heard the swish of the cane and the complaints of the victims, and the lessons were very long, and there were no excuses for not knowing them; and not knowing them meant caning and mockery, which also hurt; and confinement, fisticuffs, whipping, and the ignominy of all these things. Who is the brave soul who could truly paint such [redacted] scenes if the worst of it was what the spirit felt and not what the eyes saw and the flesh suffered? (Esbozos y rasguños, "Más reminiscencias," Obras completas, v. 1, Madrid, [1881], 1959), p. 121.

He then goes on to say that "one had to know the lesson literally ("al pie de la letra"), word for word. One misplaced word, one substitute, was enough to merit punishment," (p. 1226). Why, one asks, was this so? Pereda explains that the professor "taught the way he had been taught: by blows. Little by little the habit became part of his nature. The want of intellect, the extreme devotion to the profession, the traditions of the classroom and the educational system did the rest," (p. 1232).

And finally, here is the testimony of yet another writer, the novelist Benito Pérez Galdós, who describes Spanish education in the 1860's:

> The class lasted hours and hours...Never was there a more repugnant nightmare, fashioned out of horrible aberrations which were called Arithmetic, Grammar or

> Ecclesiastical History... Around the axis of boredom revolved such grave problems as syntax, the rule of three, the sons of Jacob, all confounded in the common hue of pain, all tinted with loathing... (El Doctor Centeno, Obras completas, v. 4, Madrid, p. 1319).

Pereda was a conservative, Galdos a liberal -- yet both concur that the Spanish educational system was wretched. Thus, when liberals and progressives took control in 1868, one of their first priorities was educational reform. They declared, first of all, the principle of freedom of education and teaching. The instability and factionalism of the liberal regime, however, precluded any lasting reforms in education. The conservative return to power in 1874 reestablished the right of the State to dictate to schools the textbooks to be used and the curriculum to be followed. In addition, Orovio, the Minister in charge of education, sent out to the Directors (or Rectores) of the Universities a circular in which he recommended that no religious doctrines inimical to those held by the State be taught and that no political ideas be expressed to the detriment of the king's person or the constitutional monarchy then in power. The circular also stated that action would be taken against any professor who so indulges in such political or religious meditations -- i.e., expulsion from the university. The Minister's recommendations were no mere recommendations.

The result of all this was the removal of several professors from their faculty chairs. Among them was the future founder of the Institute, Francisco Giner de los Rios. For not adhering to the State's demands, he was arrested in March 1875, at 4:00 in the morning, and spent four months confine-

ment until he was finally expelled from the university.

The principle in question was clearly one of academic freedom. The State, however, saw the "university question" ("cuestión universitaria") from another angle: that is, the University and its Faculties were no more than instruments of the government's policies and, therefore, were obligated to conform to the State's instructions and directives. The professors, were, in effect, civil servants (and still are today).

This, then, is the historical and educational background to the founding of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, the Institute, in 1876.

The Institución Libre de Enseñanza

Perhaps the most significant point to be made about the Institute's existence is the profound and far-reaching, if diffuse, influence of its founder, Francisco Giner de los Ríos, a professor of philosophy of law at the University of Madrid. It was largely Don Francisco's attractive and vibrant personality which held the Institute together and proved to be the Prime Mover of the school. All the accounts of Don Francisco by friends, former students, disciples, and fellow professors stress the very personal and individual effect of the man. This is not to deny the cogency of his ideas and methods of teaching but simply to make clear that, with Don Francisco, abstractions were made concrete, in his very person; that is, through him and his relations with men and women, he incarnated his own beliefs. One friend had this to say about him as a teacher at the time of his death in 1915:

> What was the secret of his teaching? Did he reveal anything new? Or was it that everything was transformed at the touch of his powerful creative imagination?
>
> The secret lay as much in the form as in the substance.
>
> As a teacher, he brought us something that was the complete opposite of the old methods; and he discouraged the craze for oratory which has been so damaging to education in Spain. In his lectures at the University or at the Institution, he only aimed at one thing: to shake the pupil out of his torpor, stir him up to independent investigation, to working the thing out by himself; and above all he recommended games, art, & the country.
>
> As an educationist he created a complete system of social education, which had for its axis the child, the citizen, the man as he would like to see him, healthy in mind and body, and working for a Spain that was strong and dignified and which must one day rise again. (J.B.Trend, Origins of Modern Spain. N.Y., 1934, p. 99).

Or as another writer put it: "He gave us our conception of the universe and of the way to peel an orange." (p. 103).

What was Don Francisco's creation, the Institute, like and what were its educational and philosophical origins? How did Don Francisco and his disciples "make men," "hacer hombres," the overriding goal of the Institute? As J.B. Trend, Rafael Altamira, and others have noted, Don Francisco Giner believed that the most pressing problem of Spain was the problem of education. He, like the literary Generation of 1898, was obsessed -- and rightly so -- with the question of Spain's decadence, and the vital necessity for her regeneration. And he took the now classic position of the nineteenth-century liberal that through education lay the country's revitalization. It must be clearly understood that Don Francisco's efforts were those of a minority and directed toward a minority. It was not mass education, although the effects of the Institute certainly were to reach public education throughout Spain in the twentieth century.

First and most important, the Institute was created as a private institution, independent of both Church and State. I don't think it is necessary to do more than mention here the historic interdependence of Church and State in Spain. The credo of the Institute, which appeared regularly on the masthead of its publication, the Bulletin of the Free Institute of Education (El Boletín de la Institución Libre de Enseñanza) was as follows:

> The Free Institute of Education is completely opposed to religious, philosophical and political sectarianism, proclaiming only the principle of liberty and the inviolability of science and the concomitant independence of scientific research and explanation, with regard to any other authority than that of the conscience itself of the Professor, who is alone responsable for his ideas. (cited by A. Jiménez-Landi, "Don Francisco Giner de los Ríos y la Institución Libre de Enseñanza," Revista Hispánica Moderna, v. 25, nos 1,2, 1959, p. 16).

Because Spain's educational history had been one of bickering and divisiveness between the demands of the State and the private sector, and conflict between the precepts of the Church and needs of Science, with Religion usually dominating over Science, Don Francisco abhorred dogmatic, closed positions. He fervently believed in tolerance. It was not, however, mere intellectual benevolence which motivated Don Francisco. Rather, it was an ethical, moral stance, a way of life, which he wanted to instill in his pupils, the "Institutionists."

A follower of Giner de los Ríos, José Castillejo, has written that, for Don Francisco, "the two greatest forces in education are: the personality of the teacher and the social atmosphere and surroundings of the school" (Wars of Ideas in Spain, London, 1937, p. 97). We have already seen in the

magnetic power of Don Francisco's teaching itself the importance of the teacher's personality. What about the ambience of the school?

Here, one sees right away to what extent Don Francisco and his disciples felt compelled to move away from the current, i.e., antiquated and rigid teaching methods and atmosphere of both public and private schools in Spain. First, the classroom should be informal, akin to familial surroundings. The teacher should not merely dictate or lecture, but rather converse, using whatever approach or combination of approaches worked best, starting with the Socratic dialogue. No one method was to be used, to the exclusion of all others. The teacher was a guide, the pupils a family. A small family. Classes were to be kept small. And coeducational. (Primary and secondary education in Spain today is not coeducational.) Cordiality and the spirit of discovery were the key words at the Institute. Don Francisco aimed at dispelling not only the fear and horror of school, such as we have seen in Pereda's reminiscences, but the passivity with which most students received their education.

The original intent of the Institute was to create an alternative to the higher education of official Spain, but the desire was not to be met. It was quickly found to be beyond the resources of the Institute which suffered from chronic insufficiency of funds from its inception. Instead, the school evolved into an institution of primary and secondary education. Since most students entering a Spanish university were ill-prepared to meet its demands, the "In-

stitutionists" felt that a solid intellectual, moral, physical and spiritual background given in the primary and secondary levels of education was an *a priori* necessity.

What was taught at the Institute? Besides the traditional subjects required by the State, the curriculum included Anthropology, Technology, Social Sciences, Economics, Art, Drawing, Singing, and Handwork. Most of these subjects were generally neglected in State-and Church-run schools of the period.

Most remembered and most significant are the innovations carried out in the arts and in physical education, and the frequent excursions. First, art. "Institutionists," for the most part, tried to avoid systematic and highly structured courses in art and art history. Instead, they emphasized such activities as excursions to historical monuments and places and visits to museums. Such an unorthodox prodedure was unheard-of in nineteenth-century Spain. Rather than mere lessons, the Institute stressed the actual, vivid experiencing of art as much as possible. Like the ~~literary~~ generation of 1898, they also, in a sense, rediscovered Spanish cultural heritage, by extolling the value of Spanish folklore, architecture and painting. It was, for example, a disciple of Don Francisco, Manuel de Cossío, who rediscovered the forgotten and neglected El Greco for Spaniards and the rest of the world.

One of the most delightful illustrations of the Institute's approach to art is to be found in Don Francisco's essay on "Spontaneous Criticism by Children of the Fine Arts."

In it he describes how a group of children of twelve and fourteen years of age, conducted by him one day to a museum, learned to form their own artistic sensibilities and judgments by comparing two pieces of sculpture, one by Donatello and the other by Lucas de la Robbia. On this occasion, Don Francisco did not even attempt to point out the obvious differences in style, expression and composition in the two sculptures. He simply let the children use their own powers of observation, uninfluenced by any previous explanations or prejudices. Thus, through observation, they were able to define the work.

The second and more difficult problem, says Don Francisco, was one of judgment. Which was the better sculpture? "I discovered," he writes, " a very curious phenomenon: there was a unanimous explosion in favor of Lucas de la Robbia. They stumbled over their words in their rush to tell me that from the very first de la Robbia had seemed to them so superior that they could scarcely understand why there should be any doubt; that sweetness, that mystical expression, that softness, that elegance, that repose. How could anyone compare this divine object with the coarse rawness and the hard, unbecoming and massive forms of Donatello? Why, it was almost a caricature of a sculpture! 'And Donatello is a sculptor with a great reputation!' they told me, almost aggressively. You can imagine how I resisted giving them the least sign of disagreement with this vehemently held point of view, nor did I even invite them to study more carefully both works before pronouncing an opinion. Showing

nothing but the most rigorous neutrality and even indifference, I began to look around rather distractedly, now at one piece, now at another. They did the same. After a little while, and spontaneously, there occurred a certain attenuation in the crudeness of their first judgment: 'No, I wouldn't say that it was exactly grotesque (in Spanish, 'un mamarracho').' 'There's a certain strength; the composition has a certain vigor.' 'If you put the piece in the right place, itwouldn't seem so bulky, so massive...' And then: 'You know, if you really look hard at these things of Donatello, they're very manly; de la Robbia seems a little effeminate,' etc., etc. Finally, why prolong it? The gradual reversal of opinion in favor of Donatello reached the point of one child saying: 'There must be other works of Lucas de la Robbia which deserve his fame.' And it was precisely the very boy who had first placed in doubt the merits of Donatello's own reputation." ("Antología," Revista Hispánica Moderna, v. 25, nos. 1,2, 1959, pp. 132-133).

A second innovation which I mentioned before was the approach to physical education. Rather than the routine and boredom of calisthenics, directed toward a military goal of physical competence, the Institute stressed games, games which were to form character. The use of games as an ethical force is, of course, an educational practice borrowed from the public schools of England. Anyone who has read Kipling's Stalky and Company or the early school novels of P.G.Wodehouse will have a good idea of what I am referring to.

But, for Don Francisco, playing cricket and football

also signified that the whole person was being educated. Intellectual formation alone was lopsided. To provide an integral education required an awareness and use of one's own body. Mere discreet walks, in carefully monitored lines, which was the usual practice and extent of physical exercise in other schools, were simply inadequate.

The third aspect of the Institute's educational program were the excursions out to the countryside. This also was unheard-of in the last century in Spain. Long walks and mountain climbing simply were not done. In Don Francisco's time, people shut all their windows tight, never letting in fresh air; they frequented taverns and cafés, and sometimes strolled casually at night for a short walk along a busy thoroughfare, but almost never thought exploring the countryside an exhilarating occupation. Again, like the Generation of 1898, Don Francisco and his Institute discovered the Spanish countryside. Before that, almost no one seems to have appreciated it. Realist novelists, for example, rarely describe Nature; even the Spanish Romanticists evidence little sensitivity toward Nature.

The idea, which was brought back from Paris in 1878 by one of the Institute's professors, was, like the introduction of games, imported from abroad and adapted to Spanish circumstances. Excursions developed the intellectual and physical capacities of the pupil; more important, for Don Francisco, they allowed one to enter into communion with Nature, to feel oneself as part of a Whole.

I would like to touch briefly on two other aspects of

the Institute's educational program: the use of textbooks and examinations. Don Francisco discouraged the use of textbooks; to a great extent, he did so as a reaction to the wretched official textbooks forced on students at State and Church-run schools. Instead, he preferred the creation of student notebooks which reflected the child's own judgments and synthesis of the material, and which were carefully checked and read by the teachers. Likewise, Don Francisco felt that examinations brought mostly negative results. Examinations in other schools were simply the means to acquire a degree; and stressed only the student's ability to memorize and to repeat exactly what the professor dictated in class.

Respect for the freedom of the child is at the heart of the Institute's teaching. The intuitive method in education, which goes back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, by way of Froebel and Pestalozzi, was practiced by the Institute. This meant the substitution of constraint, obligation and mechanical behavior by personal effort, spontaneity, and school work which had become interesting and attractive.

These, then, were the main point of the Institute's program. It should be noted that the educational reform undertaken by the Institute was not the first instance of attempts to improve education in Spain; and that the Institute's pedagogy depended, to a large extent, on influences from abroad which were modified to suit the Spanish temperament. The pedagogical efforts of Jovellanos in the eighteenth century and the short-lived Pestalozzian schools of the early nineteenth are but two examples of such attempts at educational improvement in Spain. With regard to the Institute's

educational philosophy, we have already seen that the "Institutionists" borrowed from both England and France. And a survey of the Institute's publications reveals that Don Francisco and his colleagues were quite aware of the pedagogical approaches of Pestalozzi and Froebel.

But perhaps the most significant, if somewhat vague, influence on the Institute is derived from the importation of the ideas of an obscure, second-rate German philosopher by name of Christian Friedrich Krause by a then equally obscure Spanish professor, Julián Sanz del Río. This is not the place to examine the abstruse metaphysics of Krause or of Sanz del Río's adaptation of it, but simply to state that Sanz del Río's profoundly ethical work, Humanity's Ideal for Life strongly influenced Francisco Giner de los Ríos and many other Spanish intellectuals who, during the 1860's and 70's, called themselves Krausistas. The Krausist tendency and ideal to create a world increasingly more unified, harmonious and complete is translated in pedagogical terms into the attempt to reconcile all the faculties of the human being, to develop the whole personality of the individual so that he or she might cultivate not only an artistic taste and sensibility, but a technical preparation, spiritual elevation, and an austere, moral sense of life.

Despite the criticisms leveled against Don Francisco and his Institute of being anti-religious, the Institute did inculcate a spiritual leaning in its students without favoring any particular orthodox religious belief. Don Francisco himself was a believer. José Castillejo writes that "Giner...following Sanz del Río, believed that schools

need a religious spirit, to lift up the minds of children towards a universal order of the world, a supreme ideal of life and a harmony among men and between humanity and Nature. Without that spirit education is dead and dry" (Wars of Ideas in Spain, p. 100). One could say, in brief, that the whole of the Institute's education, the entire atmosphereof the Institute, was permeated with this spiritualization of man and the universe.

It does not take too much imagination to see that the Institute would not be without enemies. The ideological dichotomy between left and right, progressive and traditionalist, in Spain immediately polarized the significance of the Institute. It was the product of the Devil for some; the only hope and salvation in Spain for others. The Institute itself fell, one more victim, to the ravages of Spain's Civil War in 1936. Yet,looked at dispassionately, the Institute's openness to ideas and influences from the rest of Europe, its undogmatic approach to education and to life itself, could not help but bring a breath of fresh air to the closed and narrow society of nineteenth-century Spain. If it perhaps erred too much in the direction of intellectual anarchy and placed too much confidence in the innate goodness of man, the Institute's efforts at raising the moral andintellectual level of Spaniards became an all-pervasive influence in many institutions, both public and private, in government circles, in business. The Institute was "much more than a school." It was an atmosphere of intellectual andmoral enlightenment; and a belief in the regeneration of Spain.